

U.S. Tonkin Role Faulted by Senators

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A poll of Senate Foreign Relations Committee members yesterday turned up little support for Sen. Wayne Morse's view that the Johnson Administration consciously misled the country over the Tonkin Gulf incidents in August, 1964.

There is, however, substantial feeling within the Committee that:

- The Administration may have deceived itself at the time about the gravity of the Tonkin incidents.
- The Administration may have acted impetuously or unwisely in responding to the incidents with air strikes against North Vietnam.
- Administration spokesmen may have been guilty of a lack of complete candor in their public statements.

Morse has charged that U.S. naval vessels "provoked" a North Vietnamese attack on the night of Aug. 4, 1964, and that the Government "misled" the country in its explanation of how and why the incident occurred.

Another member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) substantially agreed with Morse yesterday in a statement issued in New Hampshire where he is campaigning for the Presidency.

"Some of the facts surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin are still obscure or in doubt," McCarthy said. "What is not obscure and what cannot be doubted is that the account given to the American people and Congress was not accurate and the Administration knew it."

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or should have known this at the time . . . It is only a part of a pattern of misjudgment and misstatement and distortion which has continually concealed the true facts about the war from the American people."

Morse and McCarthy, however, were the only members of the 19-man Committee who have expressed that view thus far.

A more typical judgment was that of Sen. George Aiken (R-Vt.) who said: "My own feeling is that when the incidents were first reported to the White House and to Congress, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara fully believed he was telling the true story. I am much more interested now in what will happen in the next three months than what has happened in the past three years."

Refers to Testimony

"Competitors can go on indefinitely proving their case (about the Tonkin incidents). I will say that if what the Secretary told us the other day (Tuesday) was gospel, it is something we should have been told a long time ago."

McNamara's testimony to the Committee will be made public today—240 pages, containing more than 60,000 words.

It deals with the crucial questions of whether U.S. vessels were actually attacked by the North Vietnamese and whether the response—air strikes—was justified.

The McNamara testimony was taken as part of an ex-

tended effort by the Committee to find out how and why the Administration behaved as it did in August, 1964. Another product of that effort is a top-secret report from the Committee's staff that reportedly lends weight to the Morse-McCarthy point of view.

An active member of the Committee, Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.), said yesterday that "on the basis of what I have heard I believe (1) that there was a battle of some sort (on Aug. 4) and (2) that it was not deliberately provoked (by the United States) . . .

"I don't question the retaliation (bombing) . . . but the incident itself was not large enough to require the resolution."

Sen. Clifford Case (R-N.J.) who, like Cooper, is a critic of present U.S. policy in Vietnam, said he is less concerned about rehashing the history of the Tonkin Gulf incidents than he is concerned with President Johnson's "misuse" of the Tonkin Resolution to continually expand the war.

Another Republican, Sen. Frank Carlson of Kansas, is said to have "grave doubts" about how much the Pentagon and White House actually knew about the Tonkin incidents at the time they ordered retaliatory bombing strikes.

Sparkman's View

Democratic Sen. John Sparkman of Alabama, however, replied, "Not at all," when he was asked if the Administration had misled the Committee.

"I think," he said, "that there was no purposeful misleading of the Committee (in 1964)."

Sen. John Williams (R-Del.) refused to comment on the controversy. "That's between Sen. Morse and Mr. McNamara," he said.

Sen. Karl Mundt (R-S.D.) said it "is certainly not true that Sen. Fulbright and Morse speak the majority view of the Committee in regard to the Tonkin Bay incident. Probably about five or six others do share their view. About the same number lean to the Administration view. In between are the rest of us, who are still concerned in varying degrees. Mr. McNamara has cleared up some of our questions but certainly not all."

A liberal Democrat on the Committee, who declined to be identified, said "there was no intentional misleading" by the Administration, but its "retaliation and response" to the Tonkin incidents was "inexcusable."

Another Democrat took substantially the same view and said the forthcoming transcript of McNamara's testimony will show that the Administration retaliated against North Vietnam on the basis of "scanty evidence."

Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright is said to have concluded that the main lesson from the Tonkin study is not that the Administration is given to duplicity but that it has been incompetent in dealing with the issues of war and peace.